

Measles

What is measles?

Measles is a reportable disease in Oklahoma. It is a highly infectious and serious disease caused by the measles virus. Measles is also known as rubeola, 10-day measles, hard measles, and red measles.

What are the symptoms of measles?

Symptoms of measles include high fever, cough, runny nose, watery eyes, and a red blotchy rash starting on the face then spreading to the rest of the body. Symptoms begin to appear about 7 to 14 days after a person is infected, but it can be as long as 21 days. 2-3 days after symptoms begin, Koplik spots (tiny white dots) may appear inside the mouth. After 3-5 days, a red rash appears, beginning at the hairline and spreading down the rest of the body over the next few days. When the rash appears, a person's fever may spike to more than 104°F. Symptoms may last for one to two weeks. Measles can be serious in all age groups, however, children younger than 5 years of age, adults older than 20 years of age, pregnant women, and people with compromised immune systems are at higher risk.

How is measles spread?

Measles is passed from person to person by airborne droplets from coughing and sneezing. Measles can also be spread by contact with nose and throat secretions from ill persons, or by touching a contaminated surface. Infected people can spread the virus four days before their rash starts and through four days after the rash appears. The virus can also live up to two hours in the air after an infected person leaves an area.

What can be done to prevent illness from measles?

Measles can be prevented by the measles vaccine (usually given in combination with rubella and mumps vaccines, or MMR vaccine), and is recommended for all children at 12 to 15 months of age and again at four to six years of age. If a person has not received a second dose of the vaccine between four and six years of age, it may be given at any age thereafter. The two doses of vaccine normally provide lifelong immunity.

While measles was declared eliminated in the US with the help of effective vaccines, it is still common in many parts of the world. Every year, measles is brought into the US by travelers who got measles in other countries. If you think you have symptoms of measles or were exposed to measles, please contact your health care provider or your county health department immediately.